

VETERINARIAN GETS RARE HONOUR

Veterinary research director Dr Chandrawathani Panchadcharam wants to improve livestock quality so we can always have safe, wholesome food

ADRIAN DAVID
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

AT a glance, Dr Chandrawathani Panchadcharam appears like any other civil servant.

But the demure mother of two packs a killer punch when dealing with parasites that threaten the lives of animals.

Like a martial arts exponent, Dr Chandra, as she is referred to, carries a "six-dan black belt" that knocks off the deadly microbes, ticks and worms that literally suck the blood out of livestock.

Her efforts, together with her staff at the Veterinary Services Department, have helped save hundreds of thousands of farm animals.

Many breeders will have wound up their businesses if not for the research and development of people like Dr Chandra, who is the department's research and innovation division director in Putrajaya.



Dr Chandrawathani Panchadcharam is now studying the use of herbal remedies in treating livestock.

It comes as no surprise that Dr Chandra is the first Asian woman, and only the second Asian, to be awarded an honorary membership in the World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitologists (WAAVP).

Professor Kozo Fujisaki from the National Institute of Animal Health in Tsukuba, Japan, was the first Asian to be honoured.

Dr Chandra was also one of three women in the world to be honoured since the award was introduced in 1967. She said the other two were Professor Rosina C. Krecek of South Africa and Dr Ann Donahue of the United States.

They received the award from WAAVP president Professor Douglas Colwell from Canada at a ceremony in the US recently.

Dr Chandra said to date, 45 peo-

ple had been made WAAVP honorary members, including the late Lord Soulsby of the United Kingdom.

"He is a distinguished veterinarian, 'One Health' pioneer and writer of the book *Helminths, Arthropods and Protozoa of Domesticated Animals*.

"This award is presented to persons who have contributed in a distinguished manner to the advancement of veterinary parasitology.

"I am honoured to have done Malaysia proud with my work in parasitic disease control in the veterinary industry," said Dr Chandra, who will retire on Nov 8 after 32 years of service.

On being chosen for the prestigious membership, Dr Chandra said the panel would scrutinise the candidate's work, curricu-

lum-vitae and experience.

Dr Chandra is also the immediate past president of the Society of Malaysian Parasitology and Tropical Medicine.

DEDICATED TO HER FIELD

Dr Chandra hails from Ipoh and was educated at Tarcisian Convent in Lim Garden. She graduated from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) as a doctor of veterinary medicine in 1985.

She furthered her studies at the same varsity and graduated with a Master of Science in veterinary helminthology in 1988, under the tutelage of eminent parasitologist Professor Rehana Sani.

"In 2004, I obtained my doctor of philosophy in applied helminthology from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala, Sweden, under the mentorship of Professor Peter Waller and Professor Arvid Uggla," she said.

In 1995, she became the parasitology section's head at the Veterinary Research Institute, and then its deputy director in 2007.

"Our task is to encourage young scientists to find ways of profitable farming and new test methods for disease control.

"Most importantly, we want to improve the productivity of farmers so Malaysians will always have safe, wholesome food on the table.

"It has been an absolute pleasure doing research to solve problems caused by parasites in farm animals," she said.

Dr Chandra's work is shared during lectures at various universities, including UPM, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (Unisza) in Kuala Terengganu and Universiti Kelantan Malaysia in Kota Baru.

Dr Chandra is the daughter of former Pahang Labour Department director P. Panchadcharam and Ipoh Marian Convent retired teacher M. Puvaneswari.

"I developed a passion for writing and publishing materials on parasitology," said Dr Chandra.

Her husband is J. Jeyarajah, 63, a former administrator and trustee of Yayasan Sultan Idris Shah, a foundation for the disabled.

The couple is blessed with a son, Jayashankar Jayarajah, 22, a third-year electrical engineering student at the National Defence University of Malaysia.

Daughter Jeyanthi, 18, is pursuing A Levels at Kolej Yayasan UEM.

Dr Chandra's interest and love for animals are inspired by her father-in-law, the prominent former Perak Turf Club chairman Tan Sri V. Jeyaratnam.

LIFE AS A VETERINARIAN

Dr Chandra and her team often spent hours working with farmers and animal breeders.

"This includes getting them involved in training and diagnosis at laboratories.

"We also collaborate with local and foreign universities to gain knowledge and experience," she said, adding that her superior, Department director-general Datuk Dr Quaza Nizamuddin Hassan Nizam, had given tremendous support.

Dr Chandra added that among the biggest challenges were identifying the problems faced by farmers.

"Often, animals die due to unknown, undiagnosed and untreated causes. Up to 80 per cent of my department's work involves de-worming livestock with *ubat cacing*.

"However, as the worms developed resistance, some of these drugs are not effective anymore," she said, adding that the government spent millions annually to buy *ubat cacing* for the industry.

Dr Chandra said her team also educated farmers and breeders on providing better nutrition to strengthen the immune system of their animals.

"Healthy animals provide safe food for consumers and that is our strength. We must ensure what we eat is tested and wholesome," she said.

Among the major parasites her team researched were *Trypanosoma evansi*, a protozoa that infects the blood, *Haemaphysalis longicornis* (goat ticks) and *Haemonchus contortus* (a worm that feeds on the blood of goats and sheep).

To minimise the extensive use of medication, Dr Chandra said her department was studying the use of herbal remedies.

"We are passionate about the scientific advancements in green technology and advocate greater use of this.

"One of the areas we have worked on is the use of neem and papaya leaf extracts to combat parasites," she said.

Despite her hectic schedule, Dr Chandra manages to find time for some charity work.

"I have become involved in preparing meals for the underprivileged at a soup kitchen in my neighbourhood on Saturdays and Sundays," said Dr Chandra, who is staying in Brickfields.

She added that social work offered her some time to mingle with the community of all races and do her bit for the less fortunate.



(From left) Professor Rosina C. Krecek of South Africa, Dr Ann Donahue of the United States and Dr Chandrawathani Panchadcharam of Malaysia celebrating after being presented with the World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitologists honorary membership in the United States recently. PIC COURTESY OF DR CHANDRAWATHANI PANCHADCHARAM